

And We're Still Going After Sixty Years

Yes! It is The Selsdon Gazette's 60th Birthday this month and a reproduction of the front cover of our first edition in December 1946 is to be found on the inside front cover. The keen eyed of you will have noticed that it says Volume II No.1. I will explain - there was a Selsdon Gazette before the War - I have in front of me a photocopy of No.4 May 15th 1934. At that time it was published by Manor Press in Ashford, Middlesex. They published similar magazines in several places, controlling the advertising, leaving, in our case the Residents' Association, to provide textual pages each month. I don't know who distributed the magazine, which had a blue cover, but it was published 'under the auspices of the SRA'. It ceased publication before the War.

In the autumn of 1946 the Association decided that in future they would publish the Gazette themselves, choosing their own printer and having their own editorial and advertising team. Living locally was Roy Savill, a 23 year old reporter with the Coulsdon & Purley Advertiser and he was approached to edit the new magazine. And assisted by Mrs Louise Bartlett, the associate editor and her husband, who looked after the finances, and 'Oak' Kempe, advertising manager, and after being recommended to a new printer, Mr Withall in Thornton Heath (Heath Press), the first issue of the new magazine of sixteen pages appeared in December 1946. Finance was limited as well as newsprint; the capital of £25 was on loan from the Association.

Six weeks after being appointed Editor, Roy was offered the Editorship of 'The Gillingham and Kent Messenger', the first step in a career that took him to newspapers in South America, before dying in Norwich at the early age of 44 in 1967. His departure from Selsdon meant that Mrs Bartlett took over as Editor, a post she held until 1954 when William Osborne took over as Editor. He retired through ill health in 1960 when Mrs Bartlett agreed to resume in the editorial chair. Her husband, still the Treasurer, died in 1966 and a year later she decided to give up.

Louise Bartlett must be remembered as one of the greatest of Selsdon Gazette editors. She brought the Gazette up to a much appreciated community magazine - perhaps the sixties were one of the high mark periods of the Gazette. I have been going through the issues of that period and there is a lot of Selsdon history I have gained of those years. Not only were a number of local organisations reporting monthly on their activities - The British Legion, the Townswomen's Guilds, the three churches, the Evening Institute, the Bridge Club but there were regular articles on gardening and on all manner of subjects by Miss Munroe, the local Health Visitor. Louise also wrote often quite trenchant editorials, not always just on our own matters but on national and religious - she was a Catholic - matters. By

the sixties the Gazette was running into 48 - 56 pages - she introduced the August break quite early, as she felt her staff of three or four needed a break. At one time the Scouts delivered the Gazettes. An important feature of those days were the gossip pages - Terminus Tattle - which she wrote under the pseudonym Broadway - 'Auntie Lulu' had been suggested, but declined. These were paragraphs about residents of Selsdon - who had died, who had moved away, whose sons and daughters had got engaged or married. I have to confess that when I came here in 1959 I was somewhat critical of these pages as they always seemed to be about people she knew - those well in with the churches, or the British Legion or old-timers, but in hindsight that was probably inevitable. She was, quite rightly, very upset that her husband died at the very time that it became clear that the Selsdon Community Association, which he had supported during the whole of its existence, in its aim of providing Selsdon with a community hall, was completely ignored by the new London Borough of Croydon with its Selsdon Hall (that is a separate story that I hope to relate in the new year).

It has to be noted that editing the Gazette meant a lot more work then that it does now. Printing was by letterprint and the magazine had to be typed out and sent to the printer. He then sent 'galley proofs', which were then cut up by the editorial staff and then pasted up with the adverts and illustrations in the format required - photos were on blocks. These were sent to the printer who then produced 'page proofs' - eight pages on one sheet, which were then sent back for final checking. When this was done and returned to the printer he then could produce the Gazette.. For most of the time there was an assistant editor to help out with these tasks, and particular mention must be made of Mrs F. M Thomas, who filled this position for a number of years. There were also at the start Sports and Youth editors. Louise also attended most of the functions that took place, writing herself the criticisms of local plays. Nowadays most of the Gazette is supplied to me by email, it is sent to the printer on disc and I read the proofs on my computer. But of course the work involved in delivering the gazette to each household has not changed over the years, nor has the task of attracting advertisers, although I think that was perhaps more difficult then.

Louise Bartlett's position as Editor was filled by Mrs P. Wilkinson, who carried on the Gazette in the same way for two years before moving away. As Tatler, Terminus Tattle became not quite as gossipy and it was noticeable that the Liberals and Labour now got as much prominence as the Conservatives had had previously. She was also a campaigner for a swimming pool in Selsdon. When several older residents objected to the changes taking place in Selsdon, she suggested that they should set up a Rural Selsdon Preservation Society! She also introduced for a while a Fashion Editor - Sue Gifford, who is still in Selsdon.

In May 1970, Keith Potter was appointed Editor. He was a young man, a schoolteacher and a group scoutmaster.. Keith gradually brought the Gazette into a more modern world. Rising costs demanded a reduction in the number of pages, but his first innovation was to bring many of the advertising pages to the front and back of the magazine and to print those pages in a colour. He let Terminus Tattle fade away and added more humour. In November 1971 he reproduced an article from the local Labour newsletter. Headed 'Twilight of a Shopping Centre?', I have reproduced it elsewhere and when you read it you will understand why the Selsdon traders, particularly those who advertised in the Gazette, were furious and Keith had to print an apology in the next issue. In May 1973 he was able to produce, on better paper, a new front page in a single colour, changed each month, based on a design by Mr M. J. Kotlar (see below). In my view this is still the best cover the Gazette has enjoyed. However, this was also the period of union disruption in the printing industry, which affected Heath Press, who after a merger had become a much bigger concern. Often Gazettes didn't appear or were delayed because of strikes in the printing industry. I have shown elsewhere a copy of probably a unique No 298 for January 1974, an emergency issue of eight pages on yellow paper printed unstapled on his scouts' duplicator. But Keith's piece de resistance was the 100 page issue no. 275 for December 1971 celebrating our 25th anniversary. A nostalgic production it combined pages of old gazettes, cartoons and adverts with current articles and news, sprinkled with old photographs and contained in a cover on blue paper, based on the pre-war publication.

Keith was followed in March 1974 by Leslie Stevens, a retired professional journalist - he had been editor of the Midland Bank Gazette and was an excellent cartoonist, who had enlivened Gazettes in the fifties, as well as being a well-known local actor and producer. He continued Keith's format, adjusting it to his own style. He was very good on portraits of local personalities and businesses and was an experienced drama critic. However the printing costs were escalating at an alarming rate (40% one time) and it was difficult to match these with advertising rates. In 1974 printing the Gazette cost £2015- the advertising revenue was £1614, so the excess of expenditure over income was £463. These were the years when the Association had to subsidise the Gazette. It also became evident that Heath Press, who had for many years given us favourable terms as we were an important and regular customer when they started up, no longer regarded us as special. A

new resident moved into Selsdon Ridge and he was known to Leslie and a deal was done with his firm, C S Podd & Son of Whyteleafe. Using less expensive paper costs could be cut if the Gazette were printed at tabloid size, thus saving cutting, folding and stapling costs. And so in January 1976 the Selsdon Gazette appeared in tabloid form - eight pages, equivalent to 32 at normal size. It was well received and flourished - it is unfortunate that I am unable to reproduce a specimen.

Leslie responded well to this challenge of editing a newspaper - the size began to vary from ten to twelve pages and soon a red masthead appeared. Advertising increased and more photographs appeared but by November 1977 Leslie felt the time had come to give up. Fortunately Mrs F Thomas, who had steadfastly worked as Assistant Editor continuously since 1968, agreed to take over and she continued the tabloid very much on the same lines, improving it in many ways, but to save costs, dropped the red masthead.

However it was not to last. In May 1979 Frances Thomas was wanting to give up, as she had been involved with the magazine for a number of years; further we needed a new advertising manager. No one answered her appeal and in July she edited her last Gazette "Sorry- but this is goodbye, at least for the present", ran the headline. Not only there was the problem of getting volunteers to write the Gazette, but the SRA were having difficulty in finding people to collect their subscriptions - and so affecting the amount of any subsidy to keep the Gazette afloat, but also the printer, having foregone one increase, was raising his charges, which would have meant our advertisers having to pay more. After discussion the Residents' Association decided that if we were to maintain our monthly magazine it must be on a less ambitious scale. Kirsten Elliott, who was assisting Frances, agreed to watch over the change.

Arrangements were made with St John's church to duplicate, staple and produce the Gazettes for an initial period of six months. And so in October 1979 No 359 appeared, edited by Kirsten, and aided by her husband, Steve, who took over the financial and advertising roles for the time being. It was 20 pages, typewritten, with the last Directory of Selsdon Organisations reproduced in the middle pages. Most of the advertisers continued to support the new Gazette and here mention must be made of Paul Meakin, J.B Shakespeare and A. C Heating, who for the last 39 years have continued to support us. In retrospect it looks a bit scrappy, but by December the production had improved and the content of the magazine was almost back to what it had been - even a paragraph on the Great Milk Bottle Debate!

The following year Kirsten was moving away and in November 1980 she reported that "a volunteer came forward, almost at the eleventh hour. Mrs Pam Moore bravely agreed to do the job because, as a Seldonian born and bred, she could not bear to see the paper die." Pam also contributed an editorial: "Many of you know me and, of course, my family have been involved in Selsdon since its early days. This is quite an exciting challenge and I hope I can rely on your support to keep the Gazette alive and kicking."

And so began Pam's long reign as Editor -nineteen years or thereabout. Without doubt she was the longest serving editor, although at first she was helped by Mrs

Yvonne Cox, and by Babs Ringham as Treasurer Until he died in August 1993, Sid Ringham greatly assisted the Gazette by really turning the advertising around to put that aspect on a sound footing. But for the last decade or so Pam did virtually all of the Gazette herself - editing, persuading advertisers, organising the distribution, but also looking after the finances, although John, her husband, was most supportive. However, during most of this period the Gazette was subsidised from time to time by the SRA.

The Gazette itself remained duplicated by the printing team at St Francis until 1989. The quality of the magazine improved gradually but there were times when the odd page was not straight, or there was blank space where an advert had not been secured and a short period when there were only 12 pages of text in a 36 page issue. Innovations included a Junior Page, local walks, cookery recipes and articles on veterinary matters.

In August 1989 a return to a professionally printed magazine was achieved - this time by Tremar Graphics, originally in Hackbridge, but soon to move to Wimbledon, and of course who still print the Gazette for us. Pam had arranged a competition to design a new front cover and there were 46 entries. Two were selected - one for the summer months and one for the winter and these began from early 1990 - a different colour each month, a tradition we still maintain. And being printed greatly improved the appearance of the Gazette and it then became the basis of the present magazine. By the nineties we saw the introduction of Chairman's Jottings, articles by Sanjee Corbyn, gardening notes by Richard Dering, and the appearances of rolling rubbish programmes and input from the Police. Later contributions by Brian Allen about his childhood in prewar Selsdon and David Neville's life in Cyprus enlivened the Gazette. The designs of the front cover varied - a full page one in 1994 now looks a bit garish, but two later ones were quite attractive. Pam's introduction to a word processor meant changes in font and occasional computer graphics.

In September 1999 Pam was moving to North Devon and that is when I volunteered to take over the reins. Mike Pollock and Dick Adamson had agreed to look after the distribution and finances respectively and later in 2002 Gary Morriss the advertising, so I was left free to concentrate on the content of the Gazette. It has probably changed during my tenure - I try to keep to a single Times New Roman font and I didn't like the 'bird on a bough of blossom' cover adopted as Pam left. My emphasis has been more on the historical and environmental aspects of Selsdon - Raymond Rowsell's recent articles have been greatly enjoyed - and I have introduced special covers at Christmas, as the financial status of the Gazette is healthier at the moment.

Ted Frith